

Title: The Cinematic Kunstkamera: Grotesque Animations by Wladislaw Starewicz
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This paper investigates how the aesthetic particularities of the filmic genre of animation, especially stop-motion that manipulates three-dimensional objects, is an apt vehicle for reflections on the vain human desire for god-like omnipotence and our simultaneous vulnerability to destructive and petty emotions. In his 1912 stop-motion film “The Cameraman’s Revenge,” Starewicz (who worked as a director of the Museum of Natural History in Kovno, Lithuania) reanimated dead insects to act out a human scenario, namely a romantic affair between the married Mr. Beetle and the showgirl Ms. Dragonfly. The insects are put into the distinctly human context of infidelity and experience the resulting complex of emotions, including jealousy and the desire for revenge, which highlight the peculiar socio-psychological structure of human relations. When a cameraman envious of Mr. Beetle’s affair videotapes one of his trysts with Ms. Dragonfly and plays the tape at the local movie theater for Mrs. Beetle to see, we gain insight into the distinctly human fascination with voyeurism and vicarious experience, as well as the role of entertainment in simulating and stimulating emotion. The human tendency to project our feelings and wishes onto others and others’ experiences onto our own is literalized through the cinematic projection, both that transpiring within “Cameraman’s Revenge” and that which the viewer beholds.

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